The Orator

Alberta
Aboriginal Relations

A Publication of Alberta's Ministry of Aboriginal Relations Fall/Winter 2008

Premier Ed Stelmach and Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky with: Grand Chief Stanley Lagrelle, Treaty 6; Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead, Treaty 7; and Grand Chief Arthur Noskey, Treaty 8, after the signing of a historic Protocol Agreement on Government to Government Relations between Alberta First Nations and the Government of Alberta, May 2008.

HISTORIC AGREEMENT ENSURES MEETINGS BETWEEN FIRST NATIONS, PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

Premier Ed Stelmach, Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky and the Grand Chiefs and Vice Chiefs of Treaty 6, 7 and 8 have signed a historic agreement establishing a framework for future relations.

The Protocol Agreement on Government-to-Government Relations between Alberta First Nations and the Government of Alberta ensures that Alberta will work with First Nations' through mutually negotiated and signed agreements, protocols, memoranda and understandings. These provisions recognize the importance to First Nations leaders of establishing relations directly with elected provincial representatives.

"Strong, vibrant Aboriginal communities are an important part of our province's future," the Premier told an audience of elders, grand chiefs and other dignitaries.

Minister Zwozdesky said he was excited to be part of such a historic accord. "The agreement signals a new era in building relationships with First Nations in Alberta."

The Protocol Agreement provides a commitment that Grand Chiefs will meet with the Premier once a year, and twice a year with Ministers responsible for consultation with First Nations regarding land and resource development.

For more information about the Protocol or other initiatives at Aboriginal Relations, visit our website at **www.aboriginal.alberta.ca.**

A MESSAGE FROM PREMIER ED STELMACH

Earlier this year, I had the great pleasure of creating the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations with the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky as its first minister.

The creation of a new, stand-alone ministry clearly illustrates how important a strong relationship with the Aboriginal people of Alberta is – for me, for my government and for all Albertans. It acknowledges the growing role and contributions of Aboriginal people in Alberta's society and economy.

I now have the pleasure of introducing the first issue of The Orator, a newsletter that draws its name from the historic oral tradition that has been vitally important in preserving Aboriginal history and culture.

Alberta's newest ministry connects with a highly diverse group of stakeholders –Aboriginal communities and organizations, industry associations, individual companies, federal and provincial government departments and municipalities, members of the Legislative Assembly, the media and members of the public.

I look forward to reading about the significant contributions of Alberta's Aboriginal people to this province's continued success and the important work of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations in this and future issues of The Orator.

– Premier Ed Stelmach

ALBERTA ABORIGINAL RELATIONS

Alberta Aboriginal Relations works with Aboriginal communities and other partners to enhance social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people in Alberta. In coming issues of The Orator, we will showcase the function of the ministry in greater detail. Here's a quick overview.

Examples of what we do

- We are committed to building relationships with Alberta's Aboriginal people and communities. Since becoming Minister of Aboriginal Relations in March 2008, Minister Gene Zwozdesky has travelled to dozens of Aboriginal communities across Alberta – from Fort Chipewyan to the Peavine and Kikino Métis Settlements to the Blood Reserve and elsewhere – to gain firsthand knowledge of their issues and concerns.
- We work with other government departments to support the development of programs and policies that affect Aboriginal people in Alberta.
- We advise and sometimes lead agreements between the provincial government and Aboriginal groups.
- We administer Métis Settlements legislation.
- We help resolve Aboriginal land-based issues.
- We co-ordinate First Nation land and resource development consultations.

To accomplish these objectives, the ministry has two divisions:

Consultation and Land Claims

This division identifies and resolves land-based issues in Alberta and represents Alberta in cases where Aboriginal issues interact with issues of ownership and jurisdiction over land and the use of natural resources.

Areas of responsibility include consultation, traditional use studies, responding to changes in law or its interpretation and coordinating provincial government activities in the resolution of First Nations claims.

First Nations and Métis Relations

As its name suggests, this division collaborates with First Nations and Métis people, organizations, industry, community stakeholders, other ministries and governments.

Areas of responsibility include increasing First Nations and Métis participation in the economy, improving the effectiveness of programs and services for First Nations people, approaches to enhancing Métis Settlements governance and self-reliance, and building relationships with First Nations communities.

BETTER GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMY GOALS OF MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS FUNDING

An agreement between the Government of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council will provide up to $18 million in conditional grants over the next three years to support ongoing efforts to improve local autonomy and economic self-sufficiency for the province's eight Métis Settlements.

Under an agreement signed by Minister Gene Zwozdesky and General Council President Gerald Cunningham, the Council will receive $7 million in 2008 - 09; $6 million in 2009 -10; $5 million in 2010 -11.

This funding builds on past successes and will help support initiatives that strengthen governance, enhance accountability and contribute to long-term sustainability of Métis Settlements.

The initiatives that will benefit from this funding include:

- improved ability to fulfil the Council's legislative responsibility to manage a local government;
- development of long-term infrastructure and affordable housing plans;
- promoting greater participation in the workforce with support for post-secondary education, apprenticeship programs, entrepreneurialism and self-employment; and
- working with Alberta's Solicitor-General and RCMP on community policing strategies, an element of the province's commitment to create safer and stronger communities.

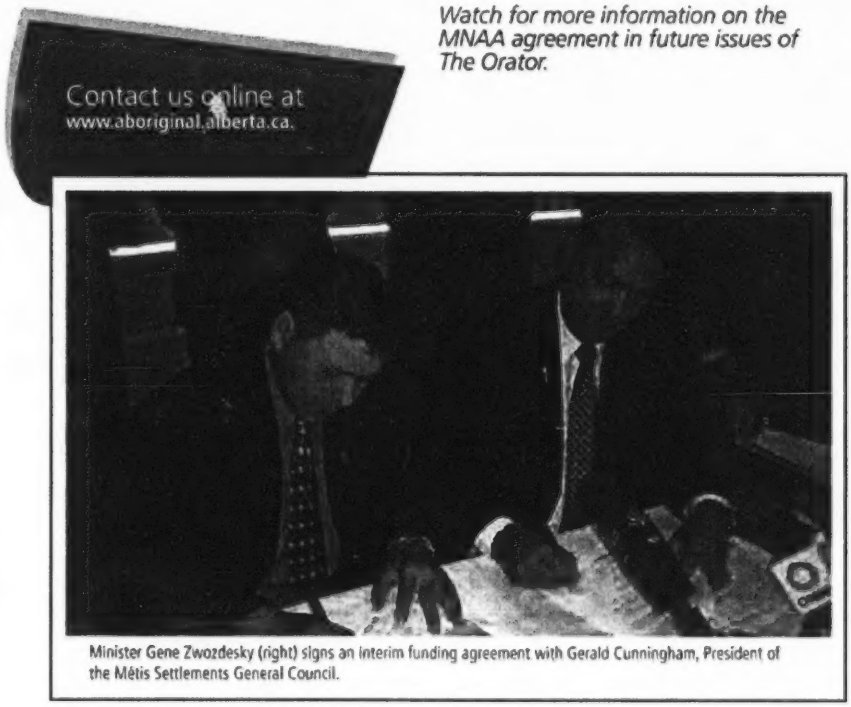
The agreement will be reviewed annually by officials from Aboriginal Relations and the Métis Settlements General Council. Funding is based on the achievement of performance measures related to specific goals.

Agreement signed with MNAA

The Government of Alberta and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA) also signed a new seven-year agreement to work together towards enhancing the economic and community well-being of Alberta's Métis people.

There have been a series of framework agreements since 1987 and the current agreement expires March 31, 2015. It differs from previous agreements and includes broad goals of economic development and Métis well-being and a provision to work with the MNAA to develop criteria upon which to assess progress toward those goals.

Watch for more information on the MNAA agreement in future issues of The Orator.



Minister Gene Zwozdesky (right) signs an interim funding agreement with Gerald Cunningham, President of the Métis Settlements General Council.

MÉTIS WEEK CELEBRATED IN ALBERTA

Métis Week, the third week in November each year, was marked by a number of activities celebrating Métis culture in Alberta.

Among the events hosted by the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNAA) was a commemoration of the life and legacy of Louis Riel at the Legislature on Nov. 16.

Speakers at the event, including MNAA President Audrey Poitras, noted how the Métis people have made a strong and lasting contribution to the development of Canada and Alberta.

"Alberta is proud to be home to the largest Métis population in Canada," said Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky, noting over 85,500 individuals have identified themselves as Métis in the province of Alberta.

"With historical roots that go back to the early 1800s, Métis people have played an important role in the growth of this great province,' he said. "Today, by celebrating and honouring the leadership of Louis Riel, we also recognize the contribution of the Métis people to Alberta's development."

Zwozdesky said the Government of Alberta has had a positive and productive relationship with Métis people in Alberta that spans the last 75 years and has led to formal agreements between the government and the two primary Métis groups – the MNAA and the Métis Settlements.

The Framework Agreement allows the province and the MNAA to continue working together to address the needs and aspirations of Métis people, while preserving their identity and cultural heritage. The agreement commits to "work towards enhancing the economic and community well-being of Alberta's Métis people."

Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky, pay tribute to Louis Riel at the Alberta legislature. The event was part of Metis Week celebrations across the province.

Alberta is the only province to have a Métis land base and a governance structure entrenched in provincial statute. More than 6,000 people are members of the eight Métis Settlements. Alberta recently signed a three-year agreement with Métis Settlements to continue the work toward their greater autonomy and economic self-sufficiency.

In recent years, governments across Canada, including the federal government, have acknowledged Louis Riel's important contributions and have denounced his hanging.

"I think the relationship between Alberta and the Métis people would make Louis Riel proud. It encompasses the very principles of fairness and self-reliance he fought for," said Zwozdesky. "Let us continue to celebrate the culture, language and heritage of the Métis people in Alberta and Canada."

Activities elsewhere in the province included a showcase of Métis culture at the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat in partnership with the Miywasin Society. The Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA) donated Métis Sash lapel pins during a traditional lunch of stew and bannock for the children of the Aboriginal Pride Program at Calgary's St. Martha School.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS PROMOTE ABORIGINAL WELL-BEING AND SELF-RELIANCE

It's said that a rising tide lifts all boats. Similarly, continued growth in Alberta's energy and resource development sectors is creating opportunities all across the province.

Growth in these two cornerstone sectors is expected to continue, providing additional opportunities for employment for Aboriginal people and opportunities to build on innovative and successful approaches undertaken by Aboriginal communities to meet their needs.

With those opportunities in mind, Aboriginal Relations developed the First Nations Economic Partnerships Initiative (FNEPI) in 2005 in consultation with First Nations and industry as a way to increase First Nations participation in the province's economy. FNEPI supports the first goal of Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework, which is to promote individual and community well-being and self-reliance.

Since its inception, FNEPI has supported 77 projects involving 23 First Nations, nine regional/tribal organizations and their industry and other partners.

Among FNEPI's success stories, the Alberta Research Council has established an Aboriginal Internship for Environmental Stewardship. This innovative partnership is designed to train members of Aboriginal communities to develop organizational capacity that will enable them to participate more effectively in land and resource management. As a result, Aboriginal communities will be better equipped to share in the benefits from resource development projects and help build stronger relationships with stakeholders.

The internship involves three First Nations, a Tribal Council, three industry partners, four provincial ministries and the Canadian Forestry Service.

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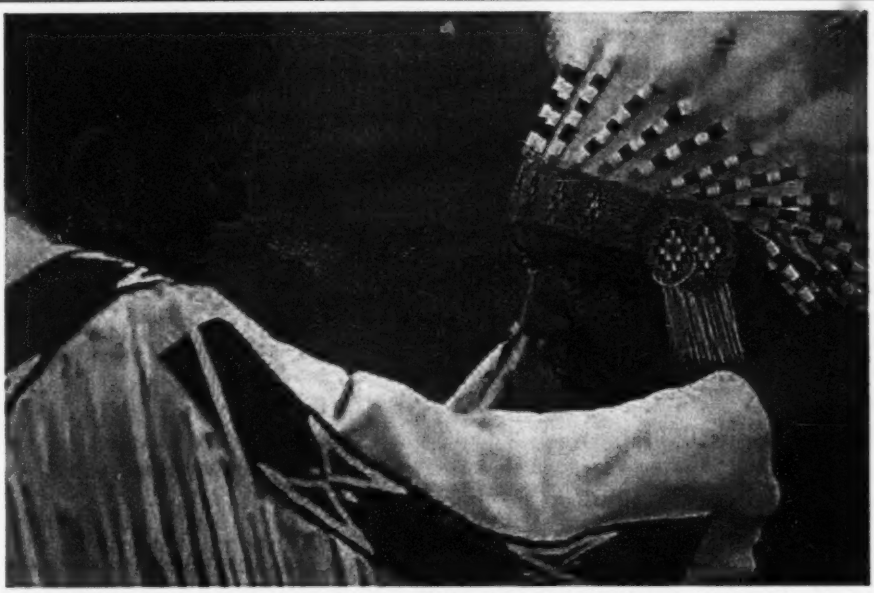
In another collaboration, Suncor Energy and the Fort McKay First Nation – with assistance from the Government of Alberta – completed a feasibility study for establishing a business incubator at the Caribou Energy Park north of Fort McMurray. The incubator will serve as a resource for entrepreneurs offering their services to oil sands industries. This project has now moved to the business planning stage. It is expected that Caribou Energy Park will one day become a hub for small business development in the oil sands region.

ZWOZDESKY NAMED "RUNNING WOLF," HONORARY MEMBER OF BLOOD TRIBE

The Blood Tribe welcomed Gene Zwozdesky, Alberta's Minister of Aboriginal Relations, into their tribe, named him Running Wolf during a ceremony on the Blood reserve, and bestowed to him with Chief's headdress, in September.

"I appreciate the significance of Indian culture and all of the traditions," said Zwozdesky, who grew up in Sangudo, northwest of Edmonton, near the Alexis reserve. "Being welcomed into the Blackfoot Nation is the biggest honour I've ever received."

Treaty 7 Chief Charles Weaselhead said the honour paid tribute to Zwozdesky for his efforts to improve First Nations relations, including his part in developing a historic protocol agreement signed by Premier Ed Stelmach and the Alberta chiefs.



Blood Tribe elder and spiritual leader Art Calling Last bestows Chief's headdress and applies ochre and red paint to the face of Minister Gene Zwozdesky at a naming ceremony on the Blood reserve in September. Photo Credit: Lethbridge Herald - Rod Leland

DID YOU KNOW?

- Alberta is home to Canada's third largest Aboriginal population.
- Alberta's Aboriginal ancestry population is close to 250,000 and has increased 23 per cent in five years (2001-2006).
- Alberta is home to Canada's largest Metis population – approximately 85,500 and growing.
- 63 per cent of Aboriginal people in Alberta now live in urban areas.
- Two of the Top 10 Canadian metropolitan areas with the largest Aboriginal populations are in Alberta – Edmonton and Calgary.
- Alberta has one of the youngest Aboriginal populations in the country. Almost a third (31 per cent) of the province's Aboriginal population is under 14 years of age compared to 19 per cent for non-Aboriginal population.

Alberta
Aboriginal Relations

GET IN TOUCH WITH US

Aboriginal Relations
Communications Branch

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PROVINCE TO CONDUCT REVIEW OF ABORIGINAL CONSULTATION POLICY, GUIDELINES

To ensure the First Nations consultation process is being implemented in an efficient manner, the Government of Alberta has committed to a comprehensive review of the process including a review of the First Nations Consultation Guidelines on Land Management and Resource Development.

The policy confirms Alberta's commitment to consult with First Nations where land management and resource development may adversely impact First Nations rights and traditional uses of Crown lands. Alberta's First Nations Consultation Policy has been in effect since May 16, 2005.

The review is intended to give First Nations and industry a chance to provide feedback on how the policy is working and to identify challenges and make recommendations for changes.

Alberta was the first province to adopt a consultation policy on land management and resource development with First Nations and industry. Consultation respects the Treaty rights of First Nations people and creates more certainty for investment.

Aboriginal Relations leads Alberta's Aboriginal Consultation Initiative. The departments of Energy, Environment, Sustainable Resource Development and Culture and Community Spirit have developed ministry-specific guidelines. They provide a practical and efficient consultation process for First Nations, industry and government.

Developing Alberta's consultation strategy is an ongoing process. Alberta will work with both First Nations and industry as consultation evolves. Alberta strives to ensure an effective First Nations consultation process for all parties in the province.

The revised policy and associated guidelines are expected to be completed by November 2009. Alberta's updated consultations guidelines for 2007-08 can be found on the Aboriginal Relations website at **www.aboriginal.alberta.ca.**

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN ALBERTA

Aboriginal – Collective term; Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 defines Aboriginal peoples to include First Nations (Indians), Inuit and Metis peoples.

First Nations – The people of the First Nations are the descendents of the original inhabitants of North America. Traditions and protocols vary from community to community.

Métis – People of mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Metis people and are accepted as such by a Metis leadership. They are distinct from First Nations, Inuit or non-Aboriginal peoples.

Inuit – Aboriginal people in northern Canada living generally above the tree line in the Northwest Territories, northern Quebec and Labrador.